Please amend the claims to read as indicated in the following list of claims:

1. [Currently amended]   Apparatus for use in making a purchase decision regarding purchase of a plurality of units of a good or service from a plurality of potential suppliers at a plurality of purchasing times within a purchase period, the apparatus comprising means for determining, estimating or otherwise obtaining one or more outcomes for each of said ~~plurality of~~ purchasing times, each outcome being defined in terms of a quantity of units of said good or service to be purchased at a respective purchasing time ~~and/or~~ and a predicted price of said good or service at a respective purchasing time, means for accessing details of terms under which said good or service may be purchased from each of said potential suppliers during said purchase period, and means for determining an optimal purchase strategy regarding purchase of said good or service during said purchase period, said optimal purchase strategy being defined in terms of, for each outcome, an allocation among said plurality of potential suppliers of a quantity of said good or service to be purchased upon an occurrence of said outcome, so as to minimise a total predicted cost of purchasing said good or service during said purchase period.

2. [Original] Apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said terms under which said good or service may be purchased from each of the potential suppliers during said purchase period include any discount offered if a quantity of units

of the good or service purchase exceeds a predetermined
level.

3. [Currently amended]   Apparatus according to claim 1,
wherein said terms include any penalty which is ~~may be~~
incurred if a quantity of units of the good or service
purchased during said purchase period is less than a preset
minimum.

4. [Original] Apparatus according to claim 1, wherein a
total quantity of units of said good or service expected to
be required to be purchased at one or more purchasing times
within said purchase period is estimated by means of a
probability function.

5. [Original] Apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said
probability function is based on one or more quantities of
the good or service purchased at respective previous
purchasing times.

6. [Previously presented]   Apparatus according to claim
1, wherein predicted price fluctuations of said good or
service are estimated by means of a probability function.

7. [Original] Apparatus according to claim 6, wherein said
probability function is based on one or more prices or
price variations at respective previous purchasing times.

8. [Original] Apparatus according to claim 1, arranged to
calculate a minimum expected cost of future purchasing of
the good or service within said purchase period.

9. [Currently amended]   Apparatus according to claim 8, wherein an expected cost of the good or service is calculated by calculating an expected cost of purchasing in respect of each outcome relating to the or each purchasing time within said period utilizing the predicted price of the good or service and ~~as well~~ the quantity of the good or service to be purchased for each said outcome.

10. [Previously presented]   Apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said minimum expected purchasing cost is calculated taking into account discounts offered by one or more suppliers for single orders of the good or service consisting of a quantity of units greater than a predetermined level, discounts offered by one or more of the suppliers for cumulative orders of the good or service greater than a predetermined level, and penalties applied by one or more of the suppliers in the event that the quantity of the good or service purchased during a contract period is less than a pre-set minimum.

11. [Original] Apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said minimum expected purchasing cost is calculated taking into account shipping costs in respect of each potential supplier.

12. [Original] Apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said shipping costs are modelled as a constant per unit of said good or service.

Claim 13.   Cancelled.

14. [Currently amended] A method for use in making a
purchase decision regarding purchase of a plurality of
units of a good or service from a plurality of potential
suppliers at a plurality of purchasing times within a
purchase period, the method comprising the steps of
determining, estimating or otherwise obtaining one or more
outcomes for each of said <u>plurality of</u> purchasing times<u>,</u>
each outcome being defined in terms of a quantity of units
of said good or service to be purchased at a respective
purchasing time ~~and/or~~ <u>and</u> a predicted price of said good
or service at a respective purchasing time, accessing
details of terms under which said good or service may be
purchased from each of said potential suppliers during said
purchase period, and determining an optimal purchase
strategy regarding purchase of said good or service during
said purchase period<u>,</u> said optimal purchase strategy being
defined in terms of, for each outcome, an allocation among
said plurality of potential suppliers of a quantity of said
good or service to be purchased upon an occurrence of said
outcome, so as to minimise a total predicted cost of
purchasing said good or service during said purchase
period.

15. [Original] A method according to claim 14, wherein said
terms under which said good or service may be purchased
from each of the potential suppliers during said purchase
period include any discount offered if a quantity of units
of the good or service purchase exceeds a predetermined
level.

16. [Currently amended] A method according to claim 14, wherein said terms include any penalty which is ~~may be~~ incurred if a quantity of units of the good or service purchased during said purchase period is less than a preset minimum.

17. [Original] A method according to claim 14, wherein a total quantity of units of said good or service expected to be required to be purchased at said one or more future purchasing times within said purchase period is estimated by means of a probability function.

18. [Original] A method according to claim 17, wherein said probability function is based on one or more quantities of the good or service purchased at respective previous purchasing times.

19. [Previously presented]   A method according to claim 14, wherein predicted price fluctuations of said good or service are estimated by means of a probability function.

20. [Original] A method according to claim 19, wherein said probability function is based on one or more prices or price variations at respective previous purchasing times.

21. [Previously presented]   A method according to claim 14, including a step of calculating a minimum expected cost of future purchasing of the good or service within said purchase period.

22. [Currently amended] A method according to claim 21, wherein an expected cost of the good or service is calculated by calculating an expected cost of purchasing in respect of each outcome relating to the or each purchasing time within said purchase period utilizing the predicted price of the good or service ~~as well~~ and the quantity of the good or service to be purchased for each said outcome.

23. [Previously presented]   A method according to claim 21, wherein said minimum expected purchasing cost is calculated taking into account discounts offered by one or more suppliers for single orders of the good or service consisting of a quantity of units greater than a predetermined level, discounts offered by one or more of the suppliers for cumulative orders of the good or service greater than a predetermined level, and penalties applied by one or more of the suppliers when the quantity of the good or service purchased during said purchase period is less than a pre-set minimum.

24. [Original] A method according to claim 21, wherein said minimum expected purchasing cost is calculated taking into account shipping costs in respect of each potential supplier.

25. [Original] A method according to claim 24, wherein said shipping costs are modelled as a constant per unit of said good or service.

Claim 26. Cancelled.

27. [Currently amended] Apparatus for use in making a current purchase decision regarding purchase of a plurality of units of a good or service from a plurality of potential suppliers based on a plurality of projected purchasing times within a purchase period, the apparatus comprising means for determining, estimating or otherwise obtaining one or more outcomes for each of said <u>plurality of</u> projected purchasing times, each outcome being defined in terms of a quantity of units of said good or service projected as being required to be purchased at a respective projected purchasing time ~~and/or~~ <u>and</u> a predicted price of said good or service at a respective projected purchasing time, means for accessing details of terms under which said good or service may be purchased from each of said potential suppliers during said purchase period, and means for determining a said current purchase decision, said current purchase decision being defined in terms of, for each outcome, an allocation among said plurality of potential suppliers of a quantity of said good or service to be currently purchased upon an occurrence of said outcome, so as to minimise a total predicted cost of purchasing said good or service during said purchase period.

28. [Previously presented] A method according to claim 14, further including purchasing the plurality of units of the good or service from the plurality of potential suppliers at the plurality of purchasing times in accordance with said optimal purchase strategy.